



PARSS Legislative Update February 27, 2023

What Happens Next in Harrisburg?

There is more legislative suspense in Harrisburg this week. The House has been able to pass a bill and a constitutional amendment to allow victims of child abuse to have an opportunity for legal action currently prohibited by the statute of limitations. The House pass legislation is singularly focused on the subject while the Senate approved a package of three constitutional amendments. We could have a standoff between the two chambers which could once again delay restoring legal rights to victims.

Also adding to the intrigue is whether there will be an appeal of the school funding case from the decision of Commonwealth Court Judge Renee Cohn Jubelirer handed down on February 7. There is additional suspense in terms of waiting to see whether new Governor Josh Shapiro's first budget address next week (March 7) will provide any additional school funding as a result of the decision. New governors are given an additional thirty days to present their first budget to the General Assembly which gives schools even less time to respond to state funding changes.

When the House returns this week there remains a great deal of uncertainty. The usual beginning of the session flow of legislation has not begun as the House has only dealt with the speakership, operating rules, and the special session bills on child abuse legal rights. There are no other bills introduced and no standing committee meetings scheduled. The uncertainty of whether current speaker Mark

Rozzi (D-Berks) will continue to serve in that capacity is another unanswered question.

Meanwhile, in the Senate, it is business as usual. The Senate Education Committee is scheduled to hold a public hearing on the teacher shortage problem on Tuesday. A [new study on teacher shortages](#) in the state was released earlier this month and found that the number of teachers certified annually in Pennsylvania has plummeted from 20,000 per year to fewer than 7,000 per year.” Further the study said, “Data suggests that rural schools and schools with high proportions of students of color and students living in poverty, which are also likely to be the most under- resourced and least able to offer competitive salaries, have the greatest challenges recruiting teachers.”

The first two education bills have been considered in committee, moved to the Senate floor, and received final passage. [Senate Bill 84](#), introduced by [Senator Kristin Phillips-Hill](#) (R-York) and [Sen. Judith L. Schwank](#) (D-Berks) repeals [section 1112 of the School Code](#). The language restricts wearing of religious garb, insignias, and other religious expressions by teachers. The language was ruled as an unconstitutional restriction of First Amendment rights in federal court. The bill passed the Senate unanimously. The Senate also unanimously passed [Senate Bill 114](#) which creates a pilot program for the higher education institutions in the PA State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) to give interested high school students training in firefighting. Prime sponsor of the bill is Senator Michele Brooks (R-Mercer).